

ESSAY I.

ON A MAN'S WRITING MEMOIRS OF HIMSELF.

LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

EVERY one knows with what interest it is natural to retrace the course of our own lives. The past states and periods of a man's being are retained in a connection with the present by that principle of self-love, which is unwilling to relinquish its hold on what has once been his. Though he cannot but be sensible of how little consequence his life can have been in the creation, compared with many other trains of events, yet he has felt it more important to himself than all other trains together; and you will very rarely find him tired of narrating again the little history, or at least the favourite parts of the little history, of himself.

To turn this partiality to some account, I recollect having proposed to two or three of my friends, that they should write, each principally however for his own use, memoirs of their own lives, endeavouring not so much to enumerate the mere facts and events of life, as to ⁴¹commemorate the successive states of the mind, and so trace the progress of what may be called the character. In this progress consists the chief importance of life; ~ but even on an inferior account also to this of what the character has become, and regarded merely as supplying a constant series of interests to the affections and passions, we have all accounted our life an inestimable possession, which it deserved incessant cares and labours to retain, and which continues in most cases to be still held with anxious attachment. What has been the object of so much partiality, and has been delighted and pained by so many emotions, might claim, even if the highest interest were out of the question, that a short memorial should be